

MINUTES
Special PTO Council Meeting re: Equity Policy
March 4, 2014

In attendance

Co-President Jen Abbott	Mason-Rice, Sarah Housman
Co-President Frieda Dweck	Mason-Rice, Kim Thurmond
Co-President Theresa Fitzpatrick	Memorial Spaulding, Doreen Rachal
Equity Andrea Steenstrup	Peirce, Melissa Boucher
Health & Safety Laura Holt	Peirce, Rachel Conn
METCO Bree Lucas	Preschool, Megan Reilly
Political Action/Education Marcia Tabenken	Underwood, Karen Manning
Secondary Repr. Sue Flicop	Ward, Cindy Henry
SPED-PAC Liaison Jo-Louise Allen	Williams, Carol Roe
Technology Josh Weiss	Williams, Nancy Sweatt
Website Manager Caroline Wilson	Williams, Sarah White
Ex-officio Rhanna Kidwell	Zervas, Helen Haley
PTO presidents/ reps	Bigelow, Carolyn Judge
Angier, Natalie Atri	Brown, Theresa Fitzpatrick
Bowen, Kirsten von Hassel	
Burr, Jaye Schneider	Newton North, Sally Brickell
Burr, Jason Wong	Newton South, Lori Lass
Cabot, Vanessa Allen	
Cabot, Erin Edwards	Other guests
Countryside, Jamie LeBlanc	Superintendent David Fleishman
Countryside, Anne Kalis	Asst. Superintendent Joe Russo
Franklin, Karen Walsh	Leo Brehm
Franklin, Julie Pinto	Margie Ross Decter, School Committee
Horace Mann, David Levine	Angela Pitter-Wright, School Committee
Horace Mann, John Oliver	
Lincoln-Eliot, Miriam Alandydy	

Review

Equity is an issue of policy and principal so it's appropriate and important for both primary AND secondary schools to participate in the discussion.

Goal: Achieving equity in technology access.

The equity cap on technology would reduce tech spending, on average, by \$150,000, which is currently distributed disproportionately throughout the elementary schools.

NPS budget =\$178 million

Technology line item=\$1.3 million

Proposed change=reduction of about \$150K—A tiny percentage of entire school budget

PTO Council leaders, equity committee and technology task force have been working together, and with School Committee leadership and NPS administration beginning last spring and throughout the fall and winter to address technology funding. Initial conversations began years ago and have been ongoing.

The FY 13 budget surplus allowed all libraries to meet the standard at all elementary schools and improved access at all middle schools.

Technology is driven by curriculum

NPS has brought all K-1 classroom technology up to standard and they're almost there with grade 2.

PARCC testing will bring in more access devices.

The NPS technology budget increased in FY 14.

The proposed change to the equity policy will continue to allow PTOs to raise money for technology, while capping technology spending like all other PTO spending equity spending (e.g. Creative Arts and Sciences, library books, classroom materials, etc.). Additional donations over the equity cap can be made to NPS, Newton Schools Foundation.

Challenge of sustaining technology: While the proposed equity changes are not a solution, it's a good place to start. In last springs PTO Council resolution, we acknowledged that sustaining the standard is beyond the scope of PTOs. An additional \$150,000-\$200,000 per year won't touch the \$2.6 million needed to reach the standard.

PTO Council is following the protocol requested by the School Committee to find a solution to the problem, working with the School Committee and NPS administration.

Sustainable funding is a real issue. PTOs can't find the solution alone. We want to continue to look for a long-term solution to this problem with SC, NPS, City of Newton.

Hope PTO energy can go toward advocacy to find a long-term sustainable source of funding.

Goal: Achieving equity in technology access. Technology cap will prevent PTOS from creating further inequities (as the existing equity policy does in all other areas related to curriculum and our children's learning experience).

Equity Policy

First adopted in late 1980s. Objective: To prevent inequities among the schools. The policy identifies certain items that PTOs cannot fund (e.g. teacher salaries) and others that are capped to prevent inequities. The policy is a School Committee policy so SC must vote on changes.

Per the policy NPS, SC or PTOC can propose changes. In the past amendments have been adopted—usually without the degree of discussion of the current proposed changes.

An was Equity Committee provided for in the original policy, but hasn't been active over the years. Going forward the Equity Committee will routinely review and make recommendations as needed. Equity Committee will include School Committee, NPS and PTO representation.

Proposed Technology Cap

There is a history of limiting funding to prevent inequity. It seems odd to many that we're prohibited from buying more than 25 copies of a textbook but there's no prohibitions on the number of laptops we can buy.

Technology has become core curriculum.

Technology fundraising in some schools is interfering in other PTO efforts.

Technology access in schools is inequitable.

Why not phase it in? An informal PTO poll earlier in the year indicates that no PTO is planning a big tech fundraiser in the next 2 year.

We've seen a spike in tech funding in schools that are capable of doing big fundraisers in recent years, causing even greater inequality.

The NPS budget improving. The technology budget increased last year. (We haven't yet seen FY15 budget because of a delay in the budget presentation to School Committee.)

Technology is a higher priority for the School Committee in budget guidelines than ever before thanks to PTOC advocacy last spring and this fall. Surplus funds were devoted to technology in last year's budget.

Why is the proposed cap on tech spending \$25/per student? Equity and Tech Task Forces looked at what the 15 elementary schools were raising over the past several years and this was an amount that seemed within reach for most schools. The annual reduction in total tech spending would average only about \$150K.

The Equity Committee made further revisions in response to PTO feedback:

- Per pupil cap will be re-evaluated by the revamped Equity Committee next year. If it's not working, it can be changed.
- Allowable Technology Spending can be "banked" for up to 3 years.
- Adding more representation to Equity Committee e.g. elementary principal and additional Asst. Superintendent

- Any changes NPS makes to the tech “standard” would be reported to PTOC

Timeline

Last spring PTOC adopted resolution, met with School Committee leadership

2013-14 school year, presentation to PTOC and feedback, meetings with NPS, School Committee leaders

Hope to have PTOC vote in April

David Fleishman

In NY where he came from, technology was paid for with taxes—property taxes are 3 times higher than in Newton. Here tech funding is on the backs of parents.

Teaching and learning drives technology. Let other districts make mistakes—we’ve learned from them, preventing wasteful tech spending.

We always have a little money left or get some additional funding later in the year and will spend it on technology.

We have lot more technology now at all levels than there was before.

Joe Russo

The NPS appreciates all that PTOs have done to support technology funding throughout the years. When Joe came to NPS 15 years ago, we really were in need. NPS is a big school system—much more of a challenge to have e.g. 1-on-1 computing. Now we’re in a much better place.

Technology in NPS was kind of like the wild West until Leo came on board and set school-based standard to focus in on what the real needs are.

Schools are in a much better place from one-time money and getting more money into the budget because technology has become a real education tool, a tool that everyone really needs to have. We’re making some inroads.

Other big cost items, like playgrounds. Joe here to listen. Wants to get the pulse.

Principals have said for years—how can we get the PTOs to get out of technology? It should be spent on other needs or maybe PTOs shouldn’t be spending so much.

There is support from the principals for this technology cap.

“We are a system. (In the words of Jim Marini) ‘A Newton education should be a Newton education.’” It shouldn’t be different in different schools.

Leo Brehm

Leo has been blown away by the role PTOs have played. We couldn't have made the advancements we've made without PTOs.

NPS is focusing on equity through integration into the curriculum. We're making sure there's an equal experience for all learners. Instructional technology folks working with curriculum coordinators and teachers so curriculum drives technology.

Questions

Q: This policy change is valuable for PTOs. We need to get out of tech fundraising. This isn't being done cold turkey. Re: annual review: Would like to see long-term view. Don't think ability to change the cap year-to-year makes sense.

A: Intention is to give a close look next year because of uncertainty and concern among PTOs. In terms of yearly—we think that equity committee needs to meet to review the equity policy—not necessarily the cap. Just to keep on top of things.

Q: Why not wait to find out where the sustainable funding will come from?

A: The inequities are growing. We want to put a stop to that. Technology has become more and more integral to our core curriculum. The NPS should be looking from a curriculum viewpoint and making decisions about priorities. It shouldn't be up to the PTOs to create differences in the learning experiences of our children.

Because spending is cyclical we got the \$150K figure from the average over 5 years.

There are a lot of areas in which parents have concerns about the budget: arts, music, class size. When Art was cut by 15 minutes, art teachers and parents were concerned but parents aren't allowed to fix that, so it seems to make sense that technology be treated like all other things that parents value. The PTOs shouldn't be making those choices, the NPS should.

Q: Concerned that with PARCC testing coming, where will the cuts be made? Will we be trading teachers or arts for computers?

A: Every district in MA took a readiness survey re: PARCC online readiness. So many schools aren't ready so report not released because there would be a revolt. So it's being phased in... some taken by paper, some online.

There's been a lot of pushback by superintendents to the state about providing funding for PARCC testing needs. It's not something we need to be worried about. We're ahead of the curve.

New schools (Angier, Cabot and Zervas) will be fully outfitted.

Q: What falls under equity cap.

A: Some things NPS will be totally responsible for: batteries, power supplies, maintenance (NPS has maintenance contract). Submit repairs to NPS—they may just replace if repair is too expensive. There are about 9,000 computers in the district. Principals have a supply budget to replace consumables like toner. Leo is monitoring and working toward putting a system in place so schools are appropriately funded and PTOs shouldn't be paying for toner and other consumables.

Definition of what's included in cap: All technology.

Leo: NPS is committed to making sure every classroom has a projector and document camera. That should come from district-based funding.

Q: What if Apple tanks and everything becomes obsolete. What if we need lots of new stuff in 3 years? Are you prepared to address obsolescence?

A: Technology always changes. We can't change so fast to get ahead of our teachers. Some districts have changed too fast and have gotten ahead of their teacher training and haven't thought about how things are used in the classroom.

We get things that we hope will last. We're very thoughtful and make sure our teachers are trained.

This district has demonstrated flexibility to keep up with our learning needs. Administrative team has been very responsive to Leo's effort.

The PTO's portion of funding won't touch the budget needed to sustain technology. That needs to be addressed with a long-term sustainable solution.

Q: What happens next? Are schools that are up-to-standard not going to get any funding until all schools are up to standard?

A: Technology purchases are curriculum driven. NPS is making sure that all schools have needed technology for designated curricular initiative.

Q: Why not cap only the schools that are in good shape and not cap the less advantaged schools

A: The schools that can't raise a lot have never been able to reach the cap. The inequity will continue to grow. Maybe PTOs can collaborate on a district-wide fundraiser so all schools in need can benefit.

Q: How will you get the money to get to standard?

A: Will get there over time.

Curriculum-driven. Monitoring teacher usage and demand.

NPS never plans on PTO funding when creating budget.

Money won't come from our operating budget. May come from one-time money. Only way to get that money in our operating budget is through tax increases.

Q: Countryside had a big tech fundraiser because they were at bottom of list for adequate technology. They raised a lot of money despite not having raised a lot in the past. It brought them together as a community.

They're not sure technology they purchased is being used. So what's the goal? What's teacher accountability? At middle school level are kids at schools that have had less access worse off than other kids?

A: Tech integration specialists at elem schools are training teachers. At middle schools carts are used constantly. If it's new to the school, it will take time to ramp up. It takes time to put training in place. Need motivated teachers.

In each curriculum area, faculty and staff are developing curriculum involving technology. Only this year we've been able to say every K classroom has an ipad so everyone can try it.

Technology is a means to an end (a tool for learning).

Q: Re: language in the equity policy—will technology be redistributed if there's inequity?

A: That's not the intent. It could happen in special circumstances, e.g. when Angier moves into new building, some of their stuff might go elsewhere because the new school will be fully outfitted.

Q: What's the definition of technology: e.g. will minigrants for microscope fall under tech?

A: The shift in the equity policy is that everything is part of equity. We have proposed a tech cap separate from the other equity cap to give the School Department a solid picture of what to expect from PTOs. Also we don't want other equity items to suffer because of tech purchases.

Q: Why no flexibility with cap?

A: Everyone has the goal to get up to standard. Once you raise money you're still not at standard. Then you have to wait 5 years to do another big fundraiser. Then when you do another—you'll just be replacing the things you bought before. The cap is a middle ground—a number that data indicate most schools can reach, to prevent inequity from increasing even further.

Q: What is the purpose of School Committee representatives being at tonight's meeting?

A: School Committee is here to listen. We want to be a part of the process. PTOs have been primary partners in a public-private partnership. But there's disparity in our community and we need to address it. NPS has been creative in using resources.

Additional comments: Feel as though the PTOC leaders are dictating to the PTO presidents. Feel that the process should be more collaborative. PTOs are good at fundraising.

PTOs are working with their tech reps and principals re purchases—not deciding on their own what to purchase.

This is the beginning of the process. This isn't the end. We need to figure out a way to solve the problem.

Joe Russo: PTOs should be out of the technology funding business. We have been talking about this for 15+ years. So close to taking some action. We should not miss this opportunity or it will be another 15 years before anything happens.